Cotati Historical Society Newsletter Anon-profit 501 (c) (3) California corporation Tax ID #30-0421172

Preserving Cotati's Past

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Summer 2021 Marie McNaughton, Editor Vol. 14 No. 2

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MORE VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

STAFF

Website Coordinator Stephen Gold Docent Coord. Marie McNaughton

COTATI MUSEUM HOURS

Still CLOSED to the public due to COVID-19.

For research, donations & other concerns, call 707-794-0305.

Inside Cotati City Hall 201 W. Sierra Avenue

THE CHS MISSION

As stated in our Articles of Incorporation, dated April 11, 2007, the specific purposes of the Cotati Historical Society are (1) to protect and preserve the history and culture of the City of Cotati, (2) to provide a permanent resource (museum and interpretive programs) for the preservation of artifacts, memorabilia and documents illustrating the past and present life of the Cotati community, municipality, and its citizens, and (3) to reach out to the general community and to support similarly guided educational and historical agencies.

Seven Exchange Bank Robberies in 21 years!

New Year's Eve 1954 Was the Juiciest

By Marie McNaughton

In a front-page Monday morning account of a Friday New Year's Eve bank heist: "A Los Angeles gunman who once warned authorities that 'crime is my business,' lies on a stone slab in the Washoe County [Nevada] morgue." Describing a robbery few Cotatians had learned about, *Press Democrat* reporter Denne Peticlerc set the tone for a fit-fora-true-crime-magazine story.

Peticlerc went on to describe a not-very-funny conspiracy of errors, involving Petaluma barber and exconvict Donald Anderson, his late friend Ronald L. Barker, and their respective hair-dyed-red wife and girlfriend—not to mention an eyebrow-raising haul of \$39,000, two kidnappings, and a bloody Reno capture.

According to the Jan. 3, 1955, story, "The night before— Thursday— they had stayed in two separate Cotati motels, drinking, and planning last minute details. . . .

"Wearing dark glasses and trench coats, they struck at the Cotati Bank about 8:45 a.m. forcing teller Richard

Gray into the vault at gunpoint, then leaving

[Gray, Agnes Azevedo, and Gladys Giddings] locked in the vault, and fleeing in their dark 1948 Buick with the loot in a pillow case taken from the Cotati Motel."

The three tellers were rescued from the bank vault by branch manager H.C. Hilliard after an hour and five minutes.

The gang's escape route took them to Occidental, Monte Rio, Highway One, Manchester, Boonville, Hopland, Ukiah, Nice, and Williams, with local deputies and FBI agents hot on their tail—or is that "trail"?

At a Reno motel, the nervous Anderson saw a guest making a phone call in the lobby and assumed that police were being summoned. The gang then kidnapped a guest and the motel owner's wife. Anderson, swinging the barrel of his .357, accidentally shot his accomplice, Barker, who later died in surgery. The surviving three served at least part of their time at the Nevada State prison in Carson City. Three more members of the larger gang were arrested in San Rafael and San Francisco.



Images from the front pages of the Petaluma Argus-Courier, Sept. 2, 1959, and The Press Democrat, Dec. 23, 1959 and Dec. 10. 1967.

Welcome to John Dell'Osso, New Board Member & Treasurer



John Dell'Osso and his wife, Jacquie, have lived in Cotati since 1986 and raised their two children here. They both grew up in Petaluma. John served 14 years on the Cotati City Council, three times as mayor, while concurrently serving on a host of other boards such as Sonoma County Library Commission, Rancho Cotati Little League, Rancho Cotati HS Project Graduation, Cotati Chamber of Commerce, SRJC

Agriculture & Natural Resource Advisory Commission, and Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District Advisory Committee.

John retired in 2019 after 36 years with the National Park Service, mostly at Point Reyes National Seashore but he also worked at the Eugene O'Neill and John Muir National Historic Sites and Grand Canyon National Park. He is very committed to protecting the history of Cotati for the future.

Bank heists, continued from the front page.

The next two Cotati bank jobs were perpetrated in September and December 1959 by the same man, known as "Doc Miller," each time with a different partner. Miller wore a Porky Pig mask, but was captured along with his colleagues in the beginning months of 1960.

Why was Cotati such an attractive center for larceny? It's too late to ask the bad guys, but it has been suggested that it was our small town's situation as the "hub of Sonoma County." With the bank then located on Old Redwood Highway just off Cotati's hexagonal center, robbers had escape routes in all directions: north and south on 101, east toward Petaluma Hill Road, west to Stony Point Road, and out Highway 116 to Sebastopol, plus east and/or west on Railroad Avenue.

Between December 1959 and April 1960, Cotati Police and other local agencies worked out a system of roadblocks, which seemed to help in capturing miscreants, though it didn't stop them from trying. A lone bandit scored in April 1960, but was captured an hour later at a west Marin roadblock. A "scroungy" fellow got through an April 1961 roadblock, but had the bad luck to pass by an FBI agent who recognized the getaway car description.

In 1965, Cotati Police added a new level of public protection with the hiring of a dog named "Berko" that as it happened was never on duty for the robberies that seemed inevitable.

A robbery in December 1967 unfortunately involved 13 hostages held at gunpoint in the bank's vault, including the responding officer who answered the silent alarm and was disarmed by the robbers.

From the CHS Collection: The Korn Vendors Orchestra

This month we feature a photo of the Korn Vendors Orchestra, who often played at the Cotati American Legion dances in the 1940s and 1950s. It was donated by Anna Sani Marshment along with a framed, signed 78 RPM recording of their hit, "The Korn Vendor Bounce."





From The Press Democrat, Oct. 28, 1976. Photo by Jeff Lee.

The perpetrators were both arrested, thanks to quick-thinking customer Ramie Ahlstrom, who took down the robbers' license plate number as soon as they left. It's probably not a coincidence that Ahlstrom was the mother of the FBI agent who caught the 1961 bandit!

Impressively, all Cotati's bank robbers were captured and tried—well, except for the fellow shot by his partner in 1954. To our knowledge, the Cotati Exchange Bank has not been robbed since 1976. Clearly, it's not worth it.

Special thanks to CHS member and local historian Jack Withington for suggesting this story.



Always Willing to Lend a Hand . . .

Text and photo by Judy Gustafson

Surrounded by artifacts donated by the Martin, Revard, and Clothier families, Bruce Martin repairs one of the large exhibit frames in the museum. Having been involved with its initial assembly, Bruce knew just what to do when the loaded pages became too heavy to lift out easily, and he took the framing home to make adjustments in his shop. A few days later, it was back to the museum with everything ready to reassemble, and it's working perfectly again.

Thank you, Bruce!

Ed. Note: Many Cotati Museum treasures from the early 20th century are from the Revard and Clothier families, including ritual objects and clothing from the local Oddfellows Lodge, of which Robert Clothier was a leader. Be sure to see them when the museum reopens.

THANK YOU TO OUR NEW AND RENEWING 2021 MEMBERS

Marion Ackerman Mark & Shannon Ackerman* Harold Berkemeier* Lillian Blodgett Richard Braden Jon Caldwell Diane Canadas Ken & Sherri Carli Tamara Davis* John Dell'Osso

Jane Ferina Melanie Fleek*

Karen & David Heisel

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Stephen Kent Jones

Michael & Janet Kurvers*

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Sharie Sbrazza*

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Jack Withington

Memorial Donations

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Richard Braden

Tubby Braden

Karen & David Heisel

Burt Chadwick

Kelly Janney

Diane Montedeocca Davis

Darlene Engellenner

Don & Perry Goff

Mark & Jolene Ibleto

Connie Martin

Kathleen Norwood

Ellen Ostrand

Marjorie Roselli

Ken & Sherri Carli

Mike Stevenson

Michael & Janet Kurvers

All the good people who have passed

Stephen Kent Jones

General Donations

Bob Draper Eric Koenigshofer Bette McKnight Marie McNaughton

*Indicates a general donation in addition to dues received Dec. 31, 2020 through May 31, 2021.

Cotati Historical Society & Museum Inside Cotati City Hall at 201 West Sierra Ave PO Box 7013 Cotati CA 94931

Take the NEW CHS Virtual Tour of Cotati

Since CHS was unable to begin its downtown Cotati walking tour program last year, we took a leap into the 21st century.

Now anyone anywhere can take a virtual tour of Cotati past and present.

Visit the CHS website:

www.cotatihistoricalsociety.org

Donations/Dues 2021-2022 If you have already paid your dues for 2021 you will be marked paid thru 2022. This form may also be used for donations, memorial donations and volunteering. Thank you for your support of Cotati Historical Society.				
Yes I want to join/renew my/our membership thru 2022 @ \$10 per person \$ \$ An additional donation of \$ is enclosed. A memorial donation of \$ is enclosed in memory of:				
Please send an acknowledgement to	t to: Address			
Member Name/s				
Address	City	,	State	ZIP
Telephone		Email		
I would like to assist the Cotati Historical Society in Help staff the museum on Saturday afternoons. Help with the annual barbecue and silent auction. Help with publicity and advertising.		Help with membership mailings & data entry.		
Other ways I might help:				
Please send to: Cotati Historical Society, PO Box 7013, Cotati CA 94931				